

Washington, DC--- Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD) voted along with the majority of the U.S. House of Representatives to approve three critical water quality bills that will significantly help state and local governments in Maryland address water quality problems and promote public health, create jobs and stimulate economic development. The bills, which will provide states and local governments with funding for waste water treatment and sewer projects, were passed in the same week Baltimore-area residents were told to expect sewer and water bill rate increases needed for repairs to the region's aging sewer system. [See story]

"The fact is, a clean, safe water supply is vital in communities - large and small, rural and urban - all across this nation" stated Hoyer. "These bills will support a variety of programs and public works projects that are critical to ensuring the quality of Maryland's water supply."

The three bills and how they will benefit Maryland are listed below:

- H.R. 720, the Water Quality Financing Act of 2007 authorizes \$20 billion over the next five years for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to help states and local communities pay for building and improving wastewater treatment facilities. The fund is the primary source of federal funding for clean water, helping to provide low-interest loans to local communities for construction of wastewater treatment facilities and other water pollution abatement projects. In 2007, Maryland received \$26,147,000 out of this fund. The Bush Administration's 2008 budget has proposed funding Maryland's share at \$16,587,000 - a cut of nearly \$10 million. Nationwide, the Bush budget would cut just under \$400 million from the fund.
- H.R. 569, the Water Quality Investment Act of 2007 authorizes \$1.5 billion for Federal sewer overflow control grants for states and local governments. These grants help address the unmet and growing needs around the country from overflow of untreated waste that can occur during severe wet weather episodes as a result of poor maintenance and deteriorating infrastructure. Sewer overflow control grants were authorized for 2002 and 2003, but the Republican-controlled Congress never appropriated any funds and let the authorization expire.
- H.R. 700, Reauthorizing \$125 million for Increasing Useable Water Supply source projects at EPA. There has been increasing interest by high growth communities across the nation to explore alternative water supplies such as reclamation, reuse, and conservation. This pilot program was authorized for 2002 through 2004, but the Republican-controlled Congress never appropriated any funds and let the authorization expire.

Hoyer noted the significance of these bills as a time when the nation is facing ongoing challenges and threats with regard to its water supply. As the Environmental Protection Agency warned in a recent report: "Without continued improvements in wastewater treatment infrastructure, future population growth will erode away many of the Clean Water Act achievements. One key reason for this clean water crisis is that much of the water infrastructure in our nation is rapidly approaching or already exceeding its projected life."

In a statement made on the floor of the U.S. House, Hoyer said, "We are not talking about a luxury, a perk, or a non-necessity. Clean, safe water is absolutely indispensable to the good health of all Americans - as well as our way of life and our continued prosperity. Just consider that our nation's farmers and fishermen and manufacturing and tourism industries rely on a clean water supply, and their activities contribute hundreds of billions of dollars to our economy every year."

"It is long past time for us to act on this important legislation," concluded Hoyer. "The new House Majority is absolutely committed to helping our cities and communities provide clean, safe water for the American people."

###